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SUBJECT: GEORGIAN TALKS WITH ABKHAZ IN SWEDEN:THE FAST
TRACK TO NOWHERE

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment. Temuri Yakobishvili, Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, told the Ambassador that last week,s talks in Sweden between de facto Abkhaz representatives yielded no progress in resolving the conflict. The talks confirmed Georgian thinking that the highest priority of decision makers in Sokhumi remains preservation of the status quo. In his view, the Abkhaz are unmotivated by promises from the West and see the Russians as the only actors willing and able to follow through on promises of economic assistance and security. Yakobashvili outlined the positions of a range of Saakashvili,s inner circle and acknowledged that Georgia will stand alone in any military confrontation in Abkhazia. Yakobashvili sees Georgia,s options for slowing Russian annexation of Abkhazia as dwindling and he also sees the Abkhaz question as inextricably linked to discord in the North Caucasus. He speculated that any fighting -- even by guerillas or partisans -- could spread quickly to the North Caucasus. The Ambassador told Yakobashvili that strategies for military action were self-destructive and urged him to find longer-term plans to build on support garnered by President Saakashvili during his meetings in Europe this month. End summary and comment.

Abkhaz Protecting the Status Quo

¶2. (C) In a frank meeting with Ambassador Tefft on June 25, Georgia,s State Minister for Reintegration Temuri Yakobashvili detailed the talks in Sweden between Georgian and de facto Abkhaz representatives the week of June 16th. The talks provided his first opportunity to meet face-to-face with the Abkhaz and he described the talks as frank and open.

He noted that opportunities for informal meetings (mostly smoke breaks and meals) created the best conditions for discussions. The minister told the Ambassador that Abkhaz de facto foreign minister Shamba,s message was clear, "There is nothing we want from you. We have our independence, even if it is quasi-independence. We know well we will never be fully independent. We can,t rely on the Americans or the Europeans. The Russians are our only option." However, during a dinner, the Abkhaz said that they understood that within ten years they would be a part of Georgia. The Abkhaz were emboldened by their view that the Russians successfully defeated Ukraine's and Georgia,s MAP aspirations and therefore have proved their strength. During the formal sessions, the Abkhaz told the Georgians that if there is a Georgian attack in Abkhazia, they will mobilize their political and military power to take Samegrelo and Kodori.

¶3. (C) According to Yakobashvili, the Georgian side raised a range of proposals including the Free Economic Zone proposal for Abkhazia. The Abkhaz delegation dismissed all

proposals as unacceptable because they originated from Georgia's government. The Georgians suggested asking academic Svante Cornell's team to draft a concept paper for a Free Economic Zone so that it would come from a neutral third party. Yakobashvili believed this concept might have had traction, but then Shamba backed away. Yakobashvili's opinion was that Shamba was ultimately unable to support any change in the status quo because he answers to hardline constituencies in Sokhumi. They fear movement of people. They do not want de-isolation if it means allowing their people to be exposed to life in Georgia, rejecting a Georgian offer to permit Abkhaz to drive into Abkhazia. Given the opportunity, the Abkhaz leaders would build a wall around Abkhazia. Yakobashvili's view was that this desire for continued isolation was very Soviet. In a separate meeting, Georgian NSC Secretary Kakha Lomaia echoed Yakobashvili's assessment of the talks in Sweden.

14. (C) Despite this, the Abkhaz see the Sochi Olympics as their opportunity for prosperity and security. As of July 1, the Minister told the Ambassador, a ferry connection between Sochi and Abkhazia will begin operation. He told us his office has confirmed the availability of tickets for the general public for this ferry.

15. (C) Yakobashvili acknowledged the difficulty for the Abkhaz side in participating in the meetings. Each of the Abkhaz representatives wanted to be seen as the "hard-liner." He speculated that Stanislav Lakoba, chairman of the de facto Abkhaz NSC, did not attend because he and Shamba are now rivals and he expects Lakoba will run against Shamba in the next "presidential" election cycle. Beyond this political rivalry, Yakobashvili said that the Abkhaz side is obsessed with talking about the Georgian Abkhaz war of 1992. They believe they can repeat their success against Georgia, with Moscow's support.

Follow up in Moscow

16. (C) After the meetings in Stockholm, Yakobashvili traveled to Moscow to continue discussions on conflict resolution. During a dinner, he spoke to former Russian FM Igor Ivanov and told us he was surprised to learn -- from Ivanov himself -- that Ivanov had been a key opinion leader within Putin's government in building anti-Georgian and anti-Saakashvili sentiment. Georgians had long believed him to have been a supportive voice. In fact, he encouraged Putin's negative tendencies toward Georgia when he headed the security council. Yakobashvili said that it was clear to him that the Russians believe they must support the Abkhaz, because, if the Russian military does not, volunteers will rally to the Abkhaz banner from around the North Caucasus. And a surge of volunteers would lead to increased separatism in the North Caucasus. He said Ivanov had convinced Putin that they could not allow such a resurgence in these largely Muslim-populated areas.

What's the Plan? And Who Is Behind It?

17. (C) As the Georgians consider their options for next steps, Yakobashvili told us that there are three camps within Saakashvili's circle of advisors. The "peaceniks" (Yakobashvili, NSC Chairman Kakha Lomaia, and Deputy Chairman of the Parliament's Defense and Security Committee Nik Rurua), those who support military action (not spelled out) and those who believe that there is a new opportunity presented with a new President in the Kremlin (also not named). Yakobashvili told us that those who support military action have been frequently quoting U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt about the costs of inaction. The minister told us that there are many ways beyond direct confrontation for Georgia to engage militarily -- including guerilla tactics and the use of partisans. When the Ambassador asked Yakobashvili to clarify Georgia's strategy for next steps

specifically with Russian peacekeepers, the Minister told him that Saakashvili has made no decision but was prepared to allow the current intense diplomatic cycle to run through this summer,s G-8 Summit. If there is no progress and Saakashvili then decides to ask the Russians to leave, western leaders will have to face the choice of supporting Georgia or the leaders will have to face the idea that "losing" Georgia and giving up a beacon of democracy and a success story of transformational diplomacy. To complete his negative assessment Yakobashvili said the Georgians have given up on the Friends of the SYG formula. He believes the Friends are completely incapable of making progress on conflict resolution.

TEFFT